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SUBJECT: REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS
AND FULL TEXT OF THE STATEMENT ISLAMIC RESEARCH COUNCIL

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Reaction from the religious leadership in Egypt to
the President's June 4 speech has been positive and reflects

comments from various sectors of Egyptian society regarding their
wish to see tangible outcomes. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) The Islamic Research Council (IRC) of the Al-Azhar Mosque
issued a statement praising the speech (Egyptian State Information
Service translation of the full text follows in para 4) and calling
for "tangible deeds." Members of the IRC echoed that statement in
the Egyptian media. On the local El-Beit Betak television talk
show, Egyptian Grand Mufti Sheikh Ali Gomaa repeated that the speech
hailed a "new era" in relations with the west based on the same
"principles of respect and partnership." He called on President
Obama to continue to work to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian
conflict and other conflicts in the region. The Egyptian English
daily, The Daily News, reported that President of Al-Azhar
University, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, described the speech as "building a
bridge of positive dialogue between different civilizations and
cultures that will benefit all humans and spread the concepts of
peace, justice and mutual respect."

¶3. (U) Background: The IRC was established in 1961 with the purpose
of being the "supreme arbitrator of Islamic legal and cultural
discourse" and speaks in the name of Al-Azhar. It is made up of 50
senior Muslim scholars from various Muslim countries and is headed
by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar Sheikh Mohammad Syed Tantawi. Other
notable member Scholars include: Dr Mahmoud Hamdi Zagzoq, the
Egyptian Minister of Endowment and Islamic affairs; Sheikh Ali
Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt; and Dr Ahmad El Tayyib, the Rector
of Al Azhar University.

¶4. (U) Begin Text:

Statement by the Islamic Research Council (IRC) of Al-Azhar Mosque
on the Occasion of Obama's Speech to Muslim World.
On the occasion of President Barack Obama's historic visit to Egypt
and his speech to the Muslim World which he gave at Cairo
University, the Members of the Islamic Research Council (IRC)
welcome President Obama's visit as a clear gesture of goodwill and
respect. This gesture is particularly welcome given the fact that
President Obama chose Egypt as the venue of his speech to the Muslim
World in recognition for its rich legacy and profound influence on
the Islamic World by virtue of its being the seat of the most
respected and influential Sunni institution of Islamic scholarship
and education in the world; Al Azhar.

The Members of the IRC view President Obama's speech as indicative
of a promising new era in relations between America and the Arab and
the Muslim worlds, and that paves the way for real dialogue among
civilizations, rather than conflict, which some may want us to
believe is unavoidable.

The Members commend President Obama for his deep appreciation for
the Islamic faith and the contributions of Islamic civilization over
the centuries in shaping the world for the better, and for his
assertion that America seeks greater engagement and a true
partnership with the Muslim world based upon mutual respect.

The Members wish to assert that they share with President Obama the
goal of a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East,
particularly between Palestine and Israel, and strongly call upon
him to make progress towards achieving such a peace in the region.
They also welcome his initiative to end the occupation of Iraq and
withdraw US forces. The Members stress that a similar initiative
should be made in Afghanistan.

The Members assure the American people that the concerns of most Muslims are identical to those of most Americans, and that they have a common desire to lead a peaceful and dignified life. They both face a common threat posed by extremism and terrorism, which people of all religions reject.

On their part, the Members of the IRC affirm that throughout its long history, Al-Azhar has provided equal educational opportunities for men and women, and has been devoted to spreading a balanced vision of Islam based on the various recognized schools of Islamic law and orthodox theology infused with spiritual depth. Students at Al-Azhar are, and have been taught not only how to master grammar, logic, and law, but they have also been given instruction in Islamic ethics and spirituality as well, which are considered integral parts of effective religious leadership, and the development of a culture of dialogue and tolerance. Combined with an understanding of contemporary issues, this holistic approach to religious education continues to draw students from all over the world to study at Al-Azhar. These students return to their countries with not only knowledge, but also the example of a balanced religiosity that, while remaining true to its principles, is able to address the needs of Muslim society in a changing world.

Al-Azhar has long been active in reaching out to other religious communities, both within the Islamic world, and at the international level. This spirit of dialogue can be found in the statements and fatwas of Al-Azhar's Sheikhs, as well as in the activities of its scholars.

The Members of the IRC affirm that there is a great and vast field in which both the Muslim world and the United States can act together, including rejecting terror, defending and promoting the moral values of compassion and justice, spreading goodwill and bridging misunderstandings, and overcoming misconceptions and stereotypes among all peoples of the world.

The Members recognize the necessity of translating these shared commitments into tangible deeds and programs to achieve these noble goals.

H.E. Dr. Mohamed El-Sayed El-Tantawy
Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar
President of the Islamic Research Council

End Text.